

February 4, 2015

Getting ready for the Penn Relays

Q: *I am a track coach and I plan to take several students to compete in the Penn Relays this spring. What is the proper procedure for obtaining visas to attend these events?*

A: Congratulations to all athletes who qualify for such an exciting and prestigious event! We will be watching to see if the next Usain or Shelly-Ann emerges.

Even if you might not be exactly sure which of your stars will participate at this time, there are still some steps that the athletes can take to be ready if they get a chance to compete.

The first step is to ensure that all potential qualifiers have passports. An interview appointment cannot be made without a valid passport, so encourage your team members to obtain a passport now. Any potential backup athlete who may or may not participate should also have a valid passport and be ready to apply for a visa if necessary.

All individuals who plan to travel to the Penn Relays should begin the process of applying for a visa as soon as possible. You can make a visa appointment well in advance of the interview date upon completion of the online application and payment of the fee. We will do all we reasonably can to accommodate Penn Relay participants, but we ask that you don't leave plans until the last minute! Planning now and following our procedures will ensure a less stressful experience for all.

Please access the website of our authorized service provider to obtain information on how to complete the application form, pay the fee, and schedule an appointment: usvisa-info.com

Participants may schedule appointments individually or as a group. Any individual can schedule appointments for up to 10 applicants. A group traveling together for a specific event may request 'Group Processor' access to book more than 10 applicants at once. Information on this function is available on our appointment website usvisa-info.com

Coaches, parents, or other responsible adults should accompany student athletes to the visa interview. Parents do not need to be present at the interview if the student is 14 and above. For athletes 13 and below, parents should accompany the athletes and bring their own passport. A sponsorship document from the school or a letter on school letterhead signed by the principal, listing all participating athletes and officials, will also be very helpful.

Issued visas and passports will be returned to the applicant by our service provider via DHL. The status of the items can be tracked via phone or online at (876) 632-7400 from Jamaica, (703) 439-2360 from the U.S., or usvisa-info.com. Please allow for the processing and delivery time when making your travel plans. We will not return passports at the Embassy.

Individuals who wish to attend as spectators should schedule individual appointments rather than group appointments. As with all nonimmigrant visa applicants, they should be prepared to

explain to a consular officer how they will finance their trip and what will compel them to return to Jamaica after attending the event.

Some members of the group may already have visas. If so, they should ensure that the visas are current and valid for multiple entry. A valid visa in an expired passport can still be used in conjunction with a new passport – just remember to bring both passports when traveling.

Good luck to all teams and participants! This could be a chance of a lifetime! We look forward to following the coverage of Jamaican participants at the Relays.

You can find more information about how to travel to the U.S. on our website, www.kingston.usembassy.gov and the website of our authorized service provider at usvisa-info.com. Keep on top of Embassy news on our Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/pages/US-Embassy-Jamaica> and by following @USEmbassyJA on Twitter. We also answer general visa questions on our Facebook and Twitter pages.